

Representative
PAT SULLIVAN
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2006 Session Preview

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Dear Neighbor,

It is an honor to represent the 47th District in the Washington State House of Representatives.

The 2006 session is underway and is scheduled to end on March 9. With the session's short 60-day time period, we will be focusing on education improvement, health care, and economic development. Other issues, such as strengthening our laws dealing with sexual predators, providing assistance to our National Guard members returning from overseas and making our government more efficient and effective will also be high priorities.

In addition to the committees I served on in 2005 – Economic Development, Agriculture & Trade, Technology, Energy & Communications, and Education – I was appointed last month to serve on the budget-writing Appropriations Committee. The four committee assignments will ensure that the 2006 session is a very busy one.

While I will continue to work on a variety of issues, I will be spending a great deal of time this session on the supplemental budget and improving our education system. This newsletter addresses these issues in more depth. I have also included a brief questionnaire. I would greatly appreciate your input on these issues. It makes my job a much easier one.

Thank you again for allowing me to represent you in Olympia. Please don't hesitate to contact me at any time with your comments and questions.

Sincerely,

Pat Sullivan
State Representative
47th District

Please
place
stamp
here



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Education: Setting Goals

In our current global economy, workers and businesses in our state and our nation are facing stiff competition from other nations across the globe. To ensure our state is able to compete with students from around the world, we embarked on education reform in our state in the early 1990's. In 1993 the Legislature adopted a sweeping education reform bill. These reforms were phased in over the years and have undergone a number of changes.

This year's sophomore class, the class of 2008, will be the first group of students who must pass all three areas of the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) in order to get their diploma. In addition to the current three test subjects – math, writing, and reading – students will also need to pass a science section beginning in 2010.

This year's sophomores will take the WASL this spring and will get their test results in early June. Those who do not pass all three areas will have an opportunity to retake any of the sections they failed in late August. They will continue to have the chance to take "retakes" in their junior and senior years as well.

For those students who have difficulty with standardized tests, those with learning disabilities, severe test anxiety, or other issues, the state is currently working on alternative assessments. The alternative assessment will be approved by the Legislature this session and must be equivalent in rigor with the WASL exam. Under current law, students who have failed the WASL twice will be eligible to take the alternative assessment.

The WASL exam has generated quite a bit of controversy as we approach the date for using it as a graduation requirement. If the requirement had been in place with last year's sophomores, less than 50% would have passed all three areas of the test on their first attempt. While some students struggled with all three areas, the math section seems to be the most troublesome with only 47% meeting the standard last year.

Over the last year, I have spent a great deal of time talking with students, parents, teachers, administrators, and business leaders. There is a great diversity of opinion on what we should do as the graduation requirement approaches. Some want to stay with the current requirement. Some have argued that the graduation requirement should be eliminated. Others have asked for the graduation requirement to be phased in with students being required to pass at least two out of the three areas until we can improve our math education. And still others have called on changing the WASL requirement to what is called a multiple measures approach – to graduate, students would be required to meet a certain score using the WASL, their grade point average, SAT scores, writing samples and other coursework.

This session we will spend a great deal of time debating the WASL and the graduation requirements. We will also be working on ways that we can improve our education system and help those students who are struggling to meet state standards. As we discuss these issues, I would like your opinion on the WASL and our graduation requirements. Please take a minute to fill out the attached comment form and send it back to me.

Budgets: Making an Investment in our Future

While our state and national economies have struggled in recent years, things have improved significantly since our 2005-07 biennial budget was approved last March. Economic forecasts anticipate that our state will have an ending fund balance of \$1.4 billion at the end of the current biennium.

Of course, this good news comes with a footnote. Much of the increased revenue is the result of a strong housing and real estate market. Other states have already experienced a slowing in these markets and our economists expect to see a major effect in our state in the near future. The Caseload Forecast Council is also estimating that we will need an additional:

- \$25.6 million for increased K-12 enrollment,
- \$54.2 million for increased corrections, long-term health, and other entitlement programs,
- and \$40.4 million to fund the cost of I-732 school employee salary increases.
- Additional funding will also be required to meet increasing demands on our mental health and medical assistance programs.

We also face the task of providing additional funding for our schools. With the 2008 graduation requirements just around the corner, we need to provide assistance for those students who are struggling

As we begin to prepare and debate the 2006 supplemental budget, we need to be wary of any new programs that will require funding in future budgets. I strongly believe we need to be fiscally responsible and provide an adequate reserve account to protect against future economic downturns, begin to seriously address our pension deficit, and provide a needed investment in our schools.

Most importantly, we need to fully utilize the Priorities and Government budgeting system and rely on our Government Management, Accountability, and Performance program. We must also take advantage of our new performance audit law to hold all agencies accountable for the funding they receive.

Survey: What do you think?

1) What grade would you give our schools?

- | Voter 1 | Voter 2 |
|-----------------------|---|
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> A-excellent |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> B-good |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> C-satisfactory |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> D-bad |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> F- failing |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> U-Don't know |

2) What reforms would you support in our public schools?

- | Voter 1 | Voter 2 |
|-----------------------|--|
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> a) Better training and pay for childcare and preschool teachers |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> b) All-day kindergarten |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> c) Mandatory before/after school for struggling students |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> d) Required parent participation in school conferences |

3) Should the WASL be a requirement for high school graduation?




- | Voter 1 | Voter 2 |
|-----------------------|----------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> Yes |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> No |

4) Should the WASL requirements be changed by:

- | Voter 1 | Voter 2 |
|-----------------------|---|
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> a) Allowing more alternative assessments for students who struggle with tests |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> b) Change the way it is scored by requiring students to be proficient in 2 out of the 3 subject areas (Math, reading, and writing) |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> c) We shouldn't make changes. Let's see what happens with this year's test |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> d) End the WASL and develop a new exam |

5) Would you support additional taxes to focus on education programs for those who are struggling in school or those who want advanced courses?

- | Voter 1 | Voter 2 |
|-----------------------|----------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> Yes |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> No |

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